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WAUKEGAN -- This city will receive a \$846,000 federal grant to fight gang problems in and around the city, officials announced Tuesday at City Hall.

It is the hope of the Police Department, along with the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, that the funds will snuff gang activity and recruitment spilling into the Waukegan area from Chicago.

It's estimated that Lake County has 3,000 active gang members, and a majority of them have ties in some way to Waukegan, said Andy Traver, a special agent in charge with ATF, who has been monitoring gang activity in Waukegan since 2006.

"A lot of Chicago gangs are looking more to the suburbs," Traver said. "There is less competition... and they are unknown at first by (police)."

The money, which was secured by U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, is the largest grant received this year by any group in the 10th Congressional District, Kirk said.

Waukegan Police Chief Bill Biang said the funds will go beyond manpower, though he would like to increase officers dedicated to street-level crimes.

Biang estimates the city has 1,000 of what he calls "hard-core" gang members, with several hundred fringe members. Gangbangers, he said, are responsible for more than 90 percent of the drug dealing in Waukegan, and are also responsible for a large number of robberies and burglaries.

Biang said his department will also work with the Lake County state's attorney, sheriff and other

neighboring police departments to identify issues caused by gangs, and how they can squelch them. That could include additional after-school programs for middle-school-age kids, who are the most vulnerable to gang recruitment, Biang said.

It is likely that departments in Zion and North Chicago could see some assistance from the funding. And ATF is expecting to add a field agent in Lake County dedicated to street gangs.

"The No. 1 goal is to reduce the amount of gang violence and the number of kids recruited to join a gang," Biang said.

Waukegan is currently seeing a downturn in gang violence, but other towns in Lake County are seeing an upswing, Traver said. That trend has been known to reverse itself quickly, however, and local agencies want to see that it doesn't.

"In a city this size, there is a lot you can do with funds like that," Traver said.